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AUTHOR Munby, Hugh
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ABSTRACT

A previous paper argued that issues of validity in self-study research are first and foremost moral arguments about educational practice. It also asserted that if a self-study is to be valid, then the educational merit of the practice studied must be appropriate. Considering the responses of symposium participants to these assertions has resulted in the conclusion that determining the educational appropriateness of teaching events is in itself an appropriate enterprise, so that self-study should not be excluded, and that the educational appropriateness of the activity being self-studied should be the prior concern of the researcher. The question remains whether it is ethical for the researcher to submit students to actions for which the educational appropriateness has not been determined. The connections between validity and ethical issues deserve further study. (Contains nine references.) (SLD)

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ISSUES OF VALIDITY IN SELF-STUDY RESEARCH: STUDYING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RESEARCH PROGRAM[1]

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Hugh Munby

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario

June 1995

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Introduction

This paper is deliberately short because it is designed to initiate discussion, a necessary step in developing the research program suggested by the title. This program concerns issues of validity in self-study research, and the present paper builds upon two previous papers in which I have began to develop this inquiry into validity. The first of these papers (a fugitive one) was prepared for a colloquium sponsored by the Department of Teaching and Teacher Education, College of Education, University of Arizona, in February 1995. I remain especially appreciative of the thoughtful comments offered by colleagues at the University of Arizona in response to the colloquium and to other ideas I advanced with them during my time there as a visiting scholar. The second paper (Munby, 1995) was derived from the first and was presented at a symposium at AERA organized by the Special Interest Group on Self-Study of Teacher Education Professors (S-STEP). To my delight, the second paper received serious critical commentary both from session's discussant, Virginia Richardson, and from association members in attendance. The quality and quantity of comments convinced me that, even if some of what I had argued was wrong, there was a clear need for continued work on validity in this form of research. The material in the present paper is the result of my thinking on this matter.

Because the paper builds directly on the final portion of the AERA paper, it begins with a recapitulation of the principal arguments there and of the concluding paragraph. This is followed by a reconstruction of two critical points raised in the discussion at the AERA symposium. The remainder of the paper considers these points.

Gazing in the Mirror: A Recapitulation

The AERA paper was undertaken on the assumption that self-study, especially self-study in the S-STEP Sig, was sufficiently important that warrant a review of validity issues. Yet it became clear, as I began work on the project, that the existence of several accounts of validity for techniques related to self-study (qualitative research, narrative research) left some issues incompletely explored. The aim of the AERA paper was to mark out the territory and find a place to begin a more thorough investigation, and its overall argument that *issues of validity in self-study research are first and foremost moral arguments about educational practice*.

[1] Paper presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Stuy of Education, Montreal, June, 1995. The paper is from the research project "Case Study Research in Teachers' Professional Knowledge" (Hugh Munby and Tom Russell, principal investigators), funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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The paper treated validity from three vantage points: traditional/technical accounts of validity, validity in narrative study, and the place of self-study in academic life, and the educative function of self-study. Traditional/technical accounts of validity are those typically found in research methods texts (e.g. Schumacher & McMillan (1993). As articulated by Eisenhart and Howe (1992), these also attend to "value constraints" which reflect the value of the research and ethical considerations, though neither are explored very far in that source. The AERA paper's venture into narrative study examined the concerns of O'Dea (1994) and Phillips (1994) for function and truth respectively, and considered Tochon's (1994) admonition that narrative inquiry not become narrative therapy. These discussions illustrate the centrality of function in discussions of research validity, and this leads to considering the place and function of self-study research in academic life. The following understandings result:

1. Self-study is intended fundamentally to be educative and so, when teacher educators engage in it, they are engaging in a normative activity just as they would be were they not studying their own practice.

2. Self-study research involves more than professional practice, because it involves *displaying* one's practice to colleagues.

3. Self-study is more than sharing aspects of professional life, and more than giving teacher educators voice. Self-study demands that those involved in it submit their understanding of morally principled professional action to the scrutiny of peers. (On this count, self-study research appears to be a high-risk venture.)

The conclusion followed swiftly: Because the object of self-study is normative, then initial questions about validity must be directed at the educational values of the professional practice itself. Or:

> *If a self-study piece is to be valid then the educational merit of the practice under study must be seen to be appropriate.*

Thus, I wrote:

> all other debates about the validity of self-study research should be subservient to debates on the educational appropriateness of the professional practice that is the object of the self-study. Decisions about which professional activities in teacher education should be condoned if not fostered take precedence over how the research avoids Bacon's (1960) "Idols" which "beset men's minds" (p. 47) and other traditional threats to validity.

Reactions to This Approach

My intention in the AERA paper was to identify a place to begin an inquiry into validity as well as to sketch some of the territory. Responses from participants tended to focus on the above conclusion and suggested to me that I was proceeding in the right direction. For instance, the high-risk character was readily accepted. Also, the suggestion that my principal conclusion was perhaps "too glib" encourages me to think considerably more needs to be done (I had thought that anyway). Conceivably, the most awkward challenge to the conclusion was advanced by Virginia Richardson in her critique of the paper. She asked, and I paraphrase, "What if the intent of the self-study is to determine the educational appropriateness of professional practice?" In this situation, it would appear that the self-study research begins with some doubt about its validity, assuming that my point about the educational appropriateness has precedence over other forms of validity.

On reflection, though, I no longer find that the question threatens my argument, as I show below.

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Some Responses and Further Questions

The question about educational appropriateness seems to reinforce the importance of considering educational appropriateness as a principal component of validity, for the following reasons:

1. Determining the educational appropriateness of teaching events (at any educational level) is an appropriate research enterprise, so self-study should not be excluded from this sphere of inquiry.

2. The educational appropriateness of the activity being "self-studied" should be the prior concern of the self-studier because engaging in activities that are miseducational seems inconsistent with professional activity.

3. And because researchers need to be concerned about validity, they are bound to be concerned about educational appropriateness in the context of self-study.

These points suggest that Virginia Richardson's question points in the direction of ethics and professionalism in self-study research. Indeed (and I admit I had missed this), there is almost a tautological relationship in self-study research among being professional, being concerned for educational appropriateness, and being prepared to make the latter the prior issue of validity. But I had missed something else, and this needs some discussion.

If we allow self-study to be concerned with questions about the educational appropriateness of a particular action, then we are also allowing that the researcher (the self-studier) may be unsure of the action's educational appropriateness. And if we allow that, then we may be acknowledging that it is ethical for a self-studier to submit his or her students to actions whose educational appropriateness is in question. This raises the following questions:

1. Is self-study research ethical if the educational appropriateness of what is being studied is in doubt?

2. If it is ethical, is it still professional? That is, can we still be viewed as acting professionally if we are uncertain of the morality of what we are doing?

3. Should our students even be invited to participate in self-study under these conditions?

For me, these questions plainly show the intimate relationships among the concepts of professionalism, morality and validity. Up to this point, I do not think I had regarded ethical issues as being so intricately entwined with validity and with the professional status of the researcher. My object in presenting these questions is to see how we might follow them.

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